WHAT DO WE KNOW OF TASMANIAN LANGUAGE?

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INTRODUCTION

The Tasmanian language or languages (or perhaps dialects) has not been spoken for nearly a century. The records left are fragmentary and the orthographies so poor that it would seem that neither vocabulary nor grammar could ever be recovered from them.

The materials available to the modern student consist of a number of vocabularies, English-Tasmanian, and a number of sentences. Of running text there is practically nothing, and the translations of the sentences often seem to be completely hopeless in their inaccuracy. Various writers, such as H. Ling Roth, have attempted to write a Tasmanian grammar and to prepare a Tasmanian-English vocabulary, but the results have been far from satisfactory. H. B. Ritz, in various numbers of the Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania has endeavoured to reinterpret the vocabularies and one or two of the songs, but without any more success: in fact his translations are so closely attached to a special theory of original roots and meanings that the theory vitiates the attempt.

That remarkable anthropologist-linguist, the late Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt, who worked so hard on the study of Australian languages — and never heard one spoken — worked no less hard to produce an analysis of the remains of Tasmanian. In 1952 he published his 580-page book, Die Tasmanischen Sprachen, in which he extracted every ounce of fact that one could hope to extract from the existing documents — and perhaps a few more in excess! It was a really remarkable piece of work. In the preface he stated that it had been finished in 1919, but he had kept it in manuscript in the hope that more material might be discovered. In 1952 he gave up the hope and published the book as it stood. Ironically enough, it was in that very year that further documents did appear, when G. A. Robinson's diaries were re-discovered. These were edited by Mr. N. J. B. Plomley, who passed on to the present writer the linguistic materials contained in them, although these do not provide any basically new information. Fr. Schmidt lived just long enough to know that these materials had been found, but he never saw them and of course never used them. They are taken into account in the present paper for the first time. The only other worker in the field of Tasmanian linguistic interpretation is, strangely enough, another priest, the late Fr. E. A. Worms, whose paper in Anthropos 1960 on "Tasmanian Mythological Terms" remains the only effort, apart from Fr. Schmidt's, to interpret the sound system of the language and deal with some of the brief texts that survive.

Some little insight into the structural features of the language may be gained from the documents. In fact, Friedrich Müller in his Grundriss der Sprachwissenschaft (Vienna, 1885, Vol. II, pp. 87-9) had made a brief analysis of the grammatical features.

Phonetic study, as against grammatical, seemed impossible, just because the language had died out before the days when instrumental recording was possible. Later, however, it appeared that this was not entirely the case. A few recordings of spoken and sung Tasmanian text were made through a mixed-blood, Mrs. Fanny Cochrane-Smith. These were taken on Edison cylinders in 1899 and again in 1903 by different workers — Mr. J. B. Walker, F.R.G.S., and Mr. Horace Watson. Copies were taken from these cylinders in 1909, and in 1949 the Australian Broadcasting Commission made tapes from the now broken cylinders. The processes of repair of the cylinders do not add to the clarity of the recordings, already difficult owing to the imperfection of the early machines, and it is far from being a simple task to pick out sounds from them. It is still doubtful whether detailed phonetic study of the songs would be at all rewarding. The best line of advance still seems to be a re-examination of Schmidt's and Müller's morphological analyses, using what little extra sentence material is available from Robinson, and that is the purpose of this paper. While this is therefore essentially a review paper, a different approach has been made to the materials, in terms of modern linguistics, in a way that was not possible for either Müller or Schmidt.

Firstly, what are these materials? On the spoken, or rather sung, side, the tapes of Mrs. Cochrane-Smith's singing. These yield less than was hoped. On the written side, the vocabularies and sentences from early days. These were analysed in great detail by Schmidt in his book, but they repay further analysis from a different viewpoint. When different questions are asked, a different answer may sometimes be obtained. Hitherto all the work has been based on presuppositions resting on European grammar, and Schmidt's attempt is no more free from these presuppositions than any other, especially in the analysis of the verb. A different kind of analysis will be given here, based on a tagmemic approach to existing texts.

PHONOLOGY

One or two remarks must suffice concerning the phonetics of the language, since this paper is going to be concerned chiefly with morphology. The presence of two series of stops, voiceless and voiced, is rare on the mainland of Australia, and even in parts of Melanesia they are not found. It seems very unlikely that they existed in Tasmania. For this reason, pending what analysis can be made of the tapes, I am using here the series /p, t, t', k/. The nasals of the series seem all to be present: /m, n, ñ, ŋ/. Schmidt posited a pharyngeal fricative for he supplied a special symbol. The evidence seems to me quite insufficient; if a back frieative existed (and it depends on Schmidt's interpretation of varying spelling in the sources) it could just as well have been the velar fricative /γ/, which occurs also on the mainland of Australia. One interesting point is the occurrence of /l/ and /r/ as phonemes, and these quite frequently in the initial position. Initial laterals and rolled consonants are somewhat rare in Australia, and many of the languages do not permit them at all.

Absence of sounds is also in this connection worthy of notice. Tasmanian agrees with Australian in the almost complete absence of fricatives. As in Australian /s/ and /h/ appear to have been absent, as well as /f/ and /v/, the latter of which does occur in Australia though it is rare.

Although the consonant system apparently compared very closely with the Australian, as already stated, one exception seems necesary to Schmidt's transcription, and that is the existence of interdental /t/. In a song recorded by N. B. Tindale on Cape Barren Island in 1939, such interdentals were present, and in a discussion at the Hobart A.N.Z.A.A.S. meeting in 1965, following on the presentation of the original form of this paper, a Cape Barren Islander present asked whether "th" sounds were not present in Tasmanian, as he understood from his area that they had been. The occurrence of such sounds may therefore be accepted, and they are here used (with the symbol /t/) where the sources use "th" — which would then seem to be not a mistake, as most have assumed, but the recognition of a special sound for which no single symbol was to hand. It seems highly likely that Schmidt's two western words plöara(ba), mouse, and /ptönara/, eold, stand for /toara(ba) and /tönam/.

Schmidt also posited the two mixed vowels /ö/ and /ü/, of which only /ü/ is documented in the sources, as it is by direct mention. In point of fact the occurrence of /ü/ is remarkable, and not to be expected in the given case, but it is accepted on the authority of Milligan by Schmidt and seems to be correct. In general, Schmidt's analysis of the sound system is acceptable in most points, except his claim that the language posessed the laryngeal fricative called 'ain in Arabic. His claim is here based on variations in the orthography of words, which he believes is due to the presence of a sound which observers could not recognise in any European language known to any of them. While, of course, it is possible that Schmidt is right, it seems far more likely that the sound required is the velar fricative /γ/, the sound of intervocalic "g" in the North German pronunciation of words such as Wagen, Steigen, etc., and the symbol /γ/ is used here in such cases. The mixed vowel /ö/, similarly, does not seem to answer to the German rounded /ö/ in either variety, but is more probably to be taken as the unrounded vowel found in English "but". This is common in Australian languages, and is stated in the sources to be intended by u followed by two consonants, when, says Milligan, it sounded "as in the English words musk, lump, bump, etc.". The symbol /ö/ has been retained here partly for ease of comparison with Schmidt's results, and partly for case of printing, rather than the inverted v which is the common phonetic symbol for the sound.

Australian languages have basically a three vowel system, /i, a, u/, with a great deal of conditioned and free variation* and it is more than likely that Tasmanian was similar in this regard.

In all language study, not only are individual phonemes of importance, but their combinations in syllables, and their behaviour under stress. In Tasmanian it is extremely hard to make statements about syllable structure or stress, because it is not possible to listen to living speakers. Something may be gained here from a study of song rhythms. Schmidt devotes a section (pp. 114-121) to syllabification and accent. One of the problems is concerned with the presence of closed syllables in Tasmanian words. This syllable structure is interesting in that closed syllables of certain types occur which are not found in Australia, chiefly /ŋt/ which is too well documented to be questioned. Whether a consonant cluster /Cr/ in which C = any consonant is to be accepted cannot be determined. Schmidt did accept it, but on the mainland most investigators now believe that a short vowel is present between the two consonants. The tribal name "Wailbri" is phonemically /'walj'biri/. On this basis krakne 'existed' would be /ka'rakani/. Schmidt has ventured certain ideas on syllable structure, boundaries, juncture, etc., all of which are important, but which must be omitted in the space available here.

As the present phonemicisation differs in some ways from Schmidt's, the spellings of the original sources are here added in brackets after all quoted forms.

* See A. Capell, **A New Approach to Australian Linguistics.** The book is henceforth referred to as NAAL.

SYNTAX

If detailed study of phonetic and phonemic structure is not possible, the grammatical analysis of the language is the next problem that presents itself. Here the case is a little better, though not satisfactory. Schmidt devoted considerable space to it, but most of his verdicts amount to 'not proven'. The chief desideratum at this level of language is text in some form or other, but in Tasmanian any length of running text is conspicuous by its absence. Most of the material is sentence material, disconnected utterances only. In the few instances where a body of connected text is available there is a large measure of doubt as to whether it really represents native Tasmanian utterances or not. One such text is part of a sermon by G. A. Robinson, which is preserved in what appears to be several recensions of the one thing, or perhaps several versions of one theme used on different occasions. One text is given by J. E. Calder in an article on 'Native Tribes of Tasmania' in the Journal of the Anthropological Institute, Vol. 3 (1874), p. 28. Another occurs in the Robinson Diaries under date May 31, 1829 and is presumably preferable as an original. This text is given here (1) as spelled by Robinson, (2) as phonemicised and (3) as translated. Comments then follow. As it was preached to Bruny Island natives it is presumably a South-Eastern dialect.

MOT.TI	NYRAE	PARLERDI	MOTTI	NO.VILLY
moti	nairi	palati	moti	nowili
one	good	God	one	bad

RAEGEWROPPER	PARLERDI	NYRAE
retji-ropa,	palati	nairi
Devil,	God	good

PARLERDI	MAGGERER	WARRANGELLY
palati	makara	waraŋali
God	stop	sky

RAEGEOWROPPER	MAGGERER	TOOGENNER
retji-ropa	makara	tökana
Devil	stop	below

UENEE.	NYRAE	PARLERVAR	LOGERNER
wini.	nairi	palawa	lo:kana
fire.	Good	native	dies

TAGGERER	TEENNY	LAWWAY
takara	tini	lawey
goes	road	up

WARRANGELLY.	PARLERDI	NYRAE
warraŋali.	palati	nairi
sky.	God	good

RAEGE	etc.	etc.
redji	„	„
whiteman		

NOVILLY	PARLERVAR	LOGERNER
nowili	palati	lo:kana
Bad	native	dead

TAGGERER	TEENNY	TOOGUNNER
takara	tini	tökana
go	road	below

RAEGEWROPPER	UENEE	MAGGERER	UENEE.
retji-ropa	wini	makara	wini.
devil	fire	stop	fire.

Schmidt has shown that the normal position of the adjective is after the noun. In this case Robinson's text is 'pidgin' Tasmanian, as the adjectives precede the noun — probably intelligible to his hearers but not grammatically acceptable to them. Moreover, some of the vocabulary is strange: /moti/ is not otherwise attested as a numeral for 'one' Calder's text adds to this:

Palerdee	lowway.	Nyrae	raegae	merrydy
palati	lowei.	nairi	retji	meriti
God	above.	Good	whiteman	sick

nueberrae	Parlerdee	waerangelly.
nüperé	Palati	waraŋali.
looks (to)	God	in-sky.

Kananu	Parlerdee.	Nyrae	Palerdi	nueberrae
ka:nanu	Palati.	Nairi	Palati	nüperé
speaks to	God.	Good	God	sees

nyrae	raegee	timeme	merydy.	Noailly
nairi	retji	timemi	meriti.	nowili
good	whiteman	not	sick	Bad

parleewar	loggernu,	tageere	toogunner.
pa:lawa	lo:kanu,	taki:ri	tu:kana.
native	dies,	below	goes.

Rageowrapper		wenee	maggerer.	Parleewar
Retji	rapa	wini	makara.	pa:lawa
Evil	Spirit	fire-in	stays.	Native

tyrer.	Nyrae	parleewar	maggere.	Parlerdee
taira.	naire	pa:lawa	makara.	Palati
:ries.	Good	native	stays.	God

warangelli	timeme	merrydy,	timeme	taggathe.
waraŋali	timemi	meriti,	timemi	takati.
in-sky	not	sick,	not	hungry.

While there are difficulties about this text, it is quite easy to follow the sequence of ideas intended, and the adaption of phraseology used to help a theologically undeveloped people. A few grammatical possibilities stand out: /kananu/, 'speaks' recalls the text of Genesis, /ka:ni/ (carnee), 'said', and compared with */lo:kanu/* suggests a present tense in -nu corresponding to a past in -i. However, /nüperé/ then seems to follow another pattern. As a matter of fact */nupra/* appears for 'eye', especially in the religious phrase */pöka nüprana/* 'the man's eye' a term used for "the sun".

Apart from these consecutive passages which are certainly Robinson's efforts to speak Tasmanian, and therefore subject to both syntactic and grammatical error, there is little to assist the student. Wilkinson's translation of Genesis I-III remains only in a very small fragment, and even if grammatically correct it is only a very loose paraphrase of a few verses. It is much to be desired that his full translation and the vocabulary said to have existed, should be found again. Ling Roth quotes a passage from an earlier work by Braim, which purports to be a Tasmanian's reflections on the changes befallen his people since the arrival of the white man. This is probably more correct, if true to its presumed origin and not just a reflection by Braim himself cast into a Tasmanian form, and a similar reproduction and analysis of it is added here for what it is worth: some forms are untranslatable, and others again, such as haminen, seem to be so far astray phonetically that they cannot

be recognised now. In the following text the word puti 'not' shows that the dialect is different from Robinson's, which has timemi, and similarly /lapro/ 'see' for Robinson's */nüperé/*. The punctuation is definitely wrong and has here been disregarded.

Mena mulaga laveny powa parmera tara,
mina mulaka laweni puwa pamera tara
I hunt littlo ono wallaby,

lathakar, catabewy, probylathery, pamery
lataka katapewi propilatari pameri
kangaroo, two badger, ono

haminen trairna, pooty lapry, patrola
? t(a)re:na, puti lapri patrola
no see spark

pomely, pooty ribby mena, leprena meena.
pomali puti ripi mina leprene mina
make, no I, house my

Malanthana mena tackay mulaga, pooty
malantana mina také mulaka puti
Childhood I go hunt, not

nara pamery lowgana, lee calaguna, cracky,
nara pameri lo:kana. li kalaküna kraki
it one kangaroo bo

carticata, ludarnny, parobeny, nara moogara
katekato lütani paropeni nara mukara
very bad they "spaniel

nara mena loewgana reethen tratyatetay
nara mina lo:kana riten tratjátete.
dog" my kangaroo
they

tobantheelinga nara laway, rel-bia mena
topanti:liŋa nara lawe relpia mina
it ?up violence me

malathina mobily, worby, pua yunthea.
malatina mapili wo:pi puwa juntia.
whites many little.

One feature that stands out in the various texts, however unsatisfactory in many ways, is the fact that word-order in Tasmanian appears to have possessed a good deal of freedom. Australian languages, especially in the eastern half of the continent, present a similar picture. For example, the relative order in the sentences:

lona tyena pea mito (lona tyennabeah mito)
stone give me-to
noia mia tyaŋ mina nito lina (noia meahteang meena neeto linah)
not I give I you-to water
tyena mia pe tökané (tyennamiape tuggané)
give me food

Sentence types evidenced in the texts are:

1. Equational: 'he is my father' type ('he' = 'my father').

In these there is no equivalent to 'is', no copula verb but simply two nouns (or pronoun and noun) side by side, on the pattern A = B, Topic —> comment, e.g.

ŋana mia numpé (nangameape)
father my he-here —> "he is my father"
riena nara-wá (riena nara-wé)
hand this-(one) —> 'this is (my) hand'.

The comment (B) may be replaced by the assertive particle pea (to be discussed below):

malaŋi pea (he is) a child

Descriptive sentences follow this structural pattern although they are not equational: there is the same convergence of form as in the English types 'the man is a sailor' and 'the man is tall'. Thus lia nowatje (lienowithyé) 'the water (is) salt'; pökana taritje, (puggana taritye) '(he is) a good man'; rauna mɔ.paʁ '(my) face (is) black'. Sentences of this type coincide syntactically with adjectival phrases, as adjectives follow the noun, noyena nire 'face good'.

The nominal particle -na, to be discussed below under morphology, raises difficulty here. In the example lia nowatje, 'the water (is) salt', there is no liana, whereas in noyena nire 'face good' it is present. More study is needed on this point. It should be remarked however that examples occur in which /takara/ 'stay' is used as "be" /nienta mina takara rutelipana/ 'my sister is very tall' (nienta mena tuggara rooteleebana). The example is open to serious objections and is discussed by Schmidt (p. 336, fn. 1).

2. Sentences of the pattern N + V (noun + verb).

These are numerous, and N may be represented by a pronoun; either N or V may be expanded by adjective or adverb respectively:

lupra-ra lo:kana wi-ni (lueberera logana weenee)
wife-his lying fire-at, 'his wife is lying by the [was] fire'.
palawa makara, timemi takara (palawah maggerer, timeme tuggara)
people stay, not go
lupra* pikata lokana wi-ni, mapili lo:kana wi-ni
wife (and) child dead in-fire, many dead in-fire.
(lueberer pikata lowgana weenee, mobbily lowgana weenee.)
(These sentences are taken from entries in G. A. Robinson's diaries).

3. Sentences of the pattern: V + N, where N is object of V:

1. maŋana traka (mangana trakka)
   throw spear(s)!
2. laieni riakana (laieni riakana)
   sing song
3. tial wi, pella kaieta (teeal wee, peal kaieté)
   take stick, beat-dog

4. Sentences of the pattern V + complement.

The complement may be

(a) a particle preceding, as in
parawe riŋa pe, (parrawe ringape) 'do not run' < riné, 'run', or

(b) an adverbial complement following V, as in
riŋa pea ŋanawepere (ringapyanganaweberé)
run over-the-ground†

* This is the Sydney word, borrowed into Tasmanian.

† Milligan's vocabulary and sentences, from which this sentence is taken, do not allow of the analysis of the final phrase.

5. Sentences of the pattern $N_1 + V + N_2$ (where N_1 is subject and N_2 is object of V, which is then, of course, transitive).

Lowana ole töŋrana* (Lowana ole tubrana)
woman makes basket
women make baskets

In the Genesis translation, verse 1, Godna pomali heavena 'God made the heaven' is clearly based on the same pattern. The suffix -na is discussed below; see also verse 26: mina pomali wiŋa 'I make man'.

If N_1 is a pronoun, three positions are possible:

(i) $(V — N_1) + N_2$ or (ii) $N_1 + V + N_2$ or (iii) $N_2 + (V — N_1)$.

(i) tjana-mia pe panapuna (tyeanna miapé pannaboona)
give I bread

Milligan translates this as 'give me some bread' which seems unlikely; he follows it by two other texts both of which are unanalysable: (1) ti:ŋanána ma panapu (tecngananna me pannaboo (2) taŋunapi pé töŋariŋalia (tunghmbibé tungaringaleah) (phonemicised in the most likely way). All his other examples in $(V — N_1) + N_2$ order he translates as statements, not orders.

(ii) noia mia-tjaŋ nito (noia miatyeang nito)
no I give to you

(iii) lina tjena-mi(a) pea (leena tyeannamiapéa)
water give-I

As already indicated, these types are not mutually exclusive, but freedom of arrangement allows more than one to be used.

Combination of clauses is possible, apparently without conjunction, if the Genesis translation (verse 32) is to be accepted.

Godna lap(a) katia nara pumali
God saw all he made

MORPHOLOGY

On the level of morphology the remains of the Tasmanian language or languages set the student a much harder problem. On the surface the language appears exceedingly — almost excessively — simple. One gets the impression that this simplicity is not only deceptive but wrong, and that the Tasmanian sentences and texts such as G. A. Robinson's sermon are really pidgin Tasmanian, that the authors did not really learn the morphology of the language. It is well known, and Schmidt agrees with other students of the language, that the tense system of the verb appears to be completely absent. Even granted that, like the Baining language of New Britain, Tasmanian verbs may not have been inflected for tense, there is still something missing. A language that could employ relationship suffixes quite liberally to clarify the functions of the noun in the utterance, would very probably provide for the verb also.

* or toγ-prana.

The language shows little complication by way of contrast with the bulk of Australian languages. Fr. Müller picked out a few suffixed morphemes indicating case relationships: -na, subject, -to, indirect object, as illustrated in mi-na, 'I', ni-na, 'you' (sg), naŋga-to 'to the father' and lenu-tu, 'to the house'. Parallel to these there appears to have been a suffixed possessive; illustrated in naŋga-mia, 'my father', which in turn he might have analysed as mi-a, 'me of', but did not, probably because he took it to be identical with the prefix mia- in mia-tjaŋ. 'I give'. However, as a verbal person marker a short form m- appears before initial vowel, as will be shown below.

It may be accepted that Tasmanian nouns appeared in two forms — a stem form and a suffixed form. There is no mention of a locative suffix in Müller's work, but there is the sentence (occurring more than once) in Robinson's diaries, luprara lokana wi-ni, 'his wife is lying' (or in the second example 'is dead') in the fire < wi(na), 'fire'. Schmidt does not mention this suffix but gives -re as the normal locative ending.

Other relationships are indicated by morphemes that are most probably to be written as postpositions, e.g., wi'eta tö kana waratena lunto 'moon goes cloud under', 'the moon has gone behind the cloud'. The test between this treatment and treatment as a simple case ending would be that of phrase stress, which in the present instance cannot be applied, so that the decision between case ending and postposition remains arbitrary. The word lunto looks like a dative form with -to, but there are other forms in the vocabularies, e.g. maŋana luteno (= lotano), 'stand behind the tree', which remain uncertain. Schmidt appears to have regarded these postpositions usually as verbs, giving, for example, 'wana, 'put down, put off' (with bracketed forms 'hernieder(lassen), ab(lassen)').

Special discussion is called for in the case of a certain set of suffixes, and Schmidt is undoubtedly right in regarding these not as morpheme alternants but as regional forms. Whether it is right to speak of a Tasmanian language occurring in five dialectal forms, as Schmidt did, or whether several mutually unintelligible languages are to be recognised, is a debatable point that will be mentioned again later.

Schmidt gives considerable space to the identification of the -na ~ -lia ~ -rika ~ -like ~ -take suffix series, and concludes that (1) they are dialectal variations, (2) they have nothing to do with case, but (3) are noun-markers, (4) which are omitted when the noun is part of a possessive unit, where the formula is $N_1 + N_2 +$ [na]. There is some dialectal variation about point (4). It is impossible here to go into detail on these variations in the present space.

The possessive form is not marked by a case ending but by the omission of the noun marker from the name of the object possessed: löka(na): 'foot' < löka tonye, 'toenail'; peröka niana, 'milk (of woman)'. This is the formula $N_1 + N_2 +$ [na] mentioned above and there are few exceptions to it.

In the N +A (noun-adjective) phrase, the suffix is normally transferred to the adjective: it looks as though such an expression as lowa el-epa-na 'woman beautiful' is being construed as 'woman's beauty'. The -[na] is always phrase-final.

A natural tendency would be to regard these suffixes as subject markers, but the examples surviving are not quite consistent in their use. Calder gives tea noweli, pāmata panmalia, linana noweli (tea noailly, parmatta panmerlia, linener noailly) 'tea no good, potatoes, bread, water no good'. Here tea and pāmata appear without suffixes, panma has -lia, and lina has -na. Wilkinson's Genesis uses -na very consistently in subject position but also in object position: Godna pomali heavena, ko:ntana (Godna pomale heavena, coantana), 'God made heaven (and) earth'. He also uses the noun without suffix: lewara krak(a)ni (lewara crackne), 'darkness existed'. If these variations are really correct, they undoubtedly point to rules of definiteness and indefiniteness that cannot now be recovered, and this may well be the case, but it is equally possible that the translator is in error in at least some instances. The suggestion made here is that the -na group of endings be regarded as 'base' forms, the other endings as 'oblique' case markers. A paradigm could be built up thus:

Root: lenu 'house'
base: lenu-na 'house'
oblique: (1) lenu-to 'to the house'
(2) lenu-ni 'in the house'
(3) lenu-re 'in (? at) the house'.

The root form could be either subject or object; the base form usually subject.

Number does not appear to have been formally indicated in any way, even in pronouns. The forms given for the latter are mi-na, 'I', ni-na, 'you', na-ra, 'he, she', which could be either singular or plural. There is in Norman's vocabulary a listed form waranda, 'we' which does not appear in the sentences, and may be a mistranslation. Norman gives an entry nīggur (=/nika/.), 'it' and this appears in one of the songs sung by Fanny Smith as /nika lükarato pawi/ (nigur lugarato pawe), 'it is springtime'. In Milligan's vocabulary lugarato pawe = 'spring, wattle blossom season', but nigur is not given. This is south-eastern dialect, and if nic.er in Robinson's diaries represents the same word then the phonemic form is /nika/, as in the song recorded under Feh 22, 1834, nika plokāna (nic.er plo.kar.ner), 'it(was) a red horse'.

Possession appears to have been indicated by a series of pronominal suffixes. Following the pattern of the genitive construction mentioned above, a juxtaposition of noun and pronoun would be expected, and there are actually examples of it which do occur, e.g. nunal mina 'father I' in the vocabulary for Oyster Bay and Pittwater tribes. This is rare; far more common is a suffix: naŋa-mia, 'father-my', aŋam lia naŋina? 'where is your father?'. A full paradigm of the system is not preserved but some examples are to hand. Case suffixes are added after the possessive, giving a pattern R + p + c ('root, possessive, case'): tökana lenu-mia-to, '(I) go house-my-to'. It seems that the suffix could be omitted if the context was clear without it: ona pea naŋa-to, 'tell (it) (your) father-to'. At least the surviving examples, though of uncertain quality in many ways, do suggest that this language was rather more complicated than is sometimes stated.

There is no suggestion in any of the material that the Tasmanian verb varied for either person or tense. In this regard it is comparable to the simplest Australian type (Kattang); in fact it is even simpler, for the latter does usually express time differences by means of suffixes. In Tasmanian some of the relevant examples are :

pana manakana (punna mannakanna)
bird(s) sing(s)

noia tjana mi pea wina
not give I — stick (*sc.* to you)

paŋunea rené patili pea
horse runs efficiently —

A number of suffixes to verb stems, however, do appear. The question is how to interpret them. Schmidt's suggestions on the whole seem remarkably unhappy in a language of the type Tasmanian appears to represent, and he is not at all happy with them himself. He interprets them partly on distributional grounds as dialect variations and partly on formal grounds as marking stative (adjectival), infinitive, "ground form" etc. The particle purak after the verb is completive or perfective: miak purak 'dead'; to-me purak, 'sunken'; a phrase rendered "twilight" by Milligan: tekrimani kitana nara loŋ-purak, Schmidt translates as 'twilight small it has become'. The suffixes in question are :

1. -ali(al), -eli, -li, -keli. Schmidt guesses at this as infinitive or imperative, but such double uses are surely incompatible, and the existence of an infinitive in Tasmanian is a priori unlikely. The examples suggest rather a general or aorist force, perhaps just an imperfective with the time largely undetermined.

2. -kana, -kena seems to contrast dialectally with -kara, -kera as SE and S dialects. Schmidt suggests that a verbal noun is intended, which again seems unlikely. His suggestion in the vocabulary 941 (fn. 2) that the word translated 'vassal', piiitökana mina may be 'my tamed one' would mark -kana as participial, but this is not enough evidence. Some other interpretations in the vocabulary are also unsatisfactory: miamengana (/miamaŋana/), 'battle' is clearly 'I throw'; mia lungana 'battle' seems to be /mia löŋana/'I lie down' or 'die'; in another dialect /lo:kana/, 'lie'.

3. -te is certainly, as Schmidt records, a common adjectival ending; it may also be a present, used predicatively with adjectives.

4. -ne 'groundform' is unsatisfactory because it is not clear what a 'groundform' may be. It combines morphophonemically as -ŋ with the completive purak, as in Schmidt's examples (p. 203 but phonemicised here) k(e)raŋpurak 'ripe'; toŋ purak 'sunken'. If the -ne is not present the combinatory form is -k purak, as in tiak purak 'taken' and toyenukpurak 'heard'. The sequence /ŋ - p/ is unexpected as a form of assimilation. There remains the particle pea, pe which has been taken as an imperative marker. Its uses, however, are not limited to modifying a verb; it may occur after a noun, and in fact after both in sequence: noia tjena mi pea wina 'not give I a stick', and also tjena pea kalta pea 'give (to) the dog'. To a student of Papuan languages this recalls the Kiwai (Papuan) particle ai, which serves to 'assert' a state or action or object, and of which S. H. Ray writes :* "This particle asserts the actual performance of an action", and in Kiwai : "It takes precedence of all other verbal particles and is written prefixed to the personal or tense sign."

The wide variety of sentence types which exhibit the Tasmanian particle pea or pe make it most unlikely that this was a verbal particle of any kind. The following examples will illustrate this variety, and show that its occurrence with imperatives is only one of a number of uses :

ona pea (or una pea), 'tell him';
malaŋi pea 'the child is small' (more probably 'it is a child')
rien tona pea 'touch (his) hand'
tyana mia pe panapuna 'give me bread'
parapitali pea malana talia waraŋaté '(I) make the boat go fast'.
paŋunia rene pateli pea 'the horse runs strongly'.

Many of the combinations given in the sources as sentences seem to be merely phrases; either part of the utterance has been missed or the whole (if complete) has been mistranslated. The verbal system, even allowing for dialect variation, was evidently more complicated than the interpreters have taken it to be. In the case of the verb ta- 'to go', the following derivatives are found: ta-kana, ta-kara, ta-karako, ta-le, ta-lia, ta-we. It is difficult to suggest meanings for any of these. ta-karako is rendered 'I must go, I shall go'; tale parawe, 'don't go away'; tal pea watero, 'come here', tale lenu-to, 'go house-to', mi takara marawamina, 'I go me I', i.e. 'I am going alone'; ta-we rante wepöre, 'go run ground-on'. Many of these renderings are unsatisfactory. They mostly seem to be imperatives, which is unlikely. Moreover, there seem to be some morphophonemic changes not recognised even by Schmidt: in the last example, rante belongs to a form more usually found as rene, 'run'. If ta-le is to be taken as imperative, rante = ran/ren + le 'run', also is imperative. Yet nothing remains but to note these changes as possible explanations of irregularities. The form mitakara 'I walk' seems to be present or at best aorist, and to show a short pronoun, mi (root of mi-na 'I') preposed. The sentence

para petali pea mala-na ta-lia waraŋate
away forcefully (emph.) the boat goes quickly
shows a present progressive, if ta-lia means 'is going'.

Then also

wita ta-kana waratena linta
moon gone cloud under

would suggest a perfective or stative past meaning for -kana. These are some of the reasons for Schmidt's hesitance about assigning meanings to verb endings. The form ta-kara-ko 'I must/will go' stands alone, without context and without parallel so that nothing can be deduced from it.

The answer to the question which heads this paper is thus shown to be not quite "nothing", but only "very little", and that little contains many uncertainties, which it seems quite unlikely that time will resolve. Moreover, the situation is complicated by the question of dialectal divisions. In spite of the smallness of the aboriginal population, there seems to have been very little linguistic unity among them. Whether "dialect" is the right term to indicate the variations found in the sources, it is difficult to say; quite possibly the term "languages" is justified. A lexicostatistic estimate of the divergencies between the vocabularies may show that the boundary of "dialect" is transcended. The test of mutual intelligibility cannot be applied in the absence of speakers. Schmidt estimates five dialects; others have favoured the recognition of at least eastern and western languages, and to the present writer, judging without statistical examination, this seems a very reasonable viewpoint. In this regard also a previously rather unsatisfactory answer to the question posed becomes no more satisfactory. Possibly with more detailed examination it might do so, but this remains still for the future.

* S. H. Ray. A grammar of the Kiwai language, Fly Delta, Papua, Port Moresby, N.D., p. 43.